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8TH DISTRICT, MARYLAND

COMMITTEE ON
WAYS AND MEANS

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
GOVERNMENT REFORM

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

July 17, 2009

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Rear Admiral Matthew L. Nathan
Commander
National Naval Medical Center
8901 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20889-5600

RE: The Bethesda BRAC Multi-Modal Traffic Mitigation and
Pedestrian Access Project

Dear Admiral Nathan:

As we approach the September 2011 deadline for implementation of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) statute, I appreciate the National Naval Medical Center's ongoing cooperation as it addresses the impacts of BRAC on the surrounding community. While you are understandably focused primarily on the construction on the NNMC campus, I know that you share my concerns about the dramatic effect on traffic that the expansion of your campus will have. The success of the BRAC mission in establishing the crown jewel of military medicine in Bethesda -- the newly-designated Walter Reed National Military Medical Center -- will depend on the ability of doctors, patients and emergency vehicles to access the campus in a timely manner. If they cannot access the campus because of traffic gridlock, the mission will fail.

Today, several thousand people cross Rockville Pike each day to access the NNMC campus; more than twice as many will seek to cross after September 2011. Vehicular traffic must stop for these pedestrians, causing backups up and down Rockville Pike, adjoining roads and on the NNMC and NIH campuses.

Local transportation officials are studying the feasibility of two concepts that would address vehicular-pedestrian concerns along Rockville Pike. These proposals would address access routes from NNMC to the Metro station that would be safe for pedestrians and mitigate gridlock along Rockville Pike. I believe that these proposals provide cost-effective solutions and added benefits to NNMC and NIH, and I request that you work with transportation officials to address any concerns that you may have. Everyone involved in this project -- government officials, community leaders, and NNMC and NIH -- must work together to arrive at the best solutions for everyone.

One concept that local officials (including NNMC representatives) have discussed for the last two years, and for which funding is being sought, focuses on a shallow pedestrian tunnel under Rockville Pike that connects to elevators and escalators on each

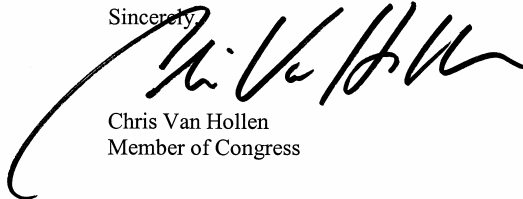
end. This project would provide safe passage to the Metro station for NNMC personnel. However, while this solution would greatly reduce the number of pedestrians crossing Rockville Pike, it would not necessarily attract all pedestrians trying to cross Rockville Pike nor would it eliminate the traffic signal at the site that controls traffic in and out of NNMC and NIH.

Consequently, local transportation officials are investigating a second, multi-modal proposal that would construct a short horizontal roadway beneath Rockville Pike and a short circular drive on the NNMC campus. This proposal would provide a grade-separated crossing for pedestrians and emergency vehicles between the NNMC and NIH campuses and would eliminate the traffic signal at that location. It would eliminate virtually all at-grade pedestrian crossings and would allow personnel and visitor vehicles bound to or from NNMC or NIH to move more freely along Rockville Pike, thus mitigating a major regional point of gridlock. It would also allow shuttle and commuter buses to easily access the Metro station transit center without impeding traffic.

A potential funding source for this project has been created under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) -- the TIGER Discretionary Grant under the authority of the Secretary of Transportation for projects of regional or national significance. I can think of no transportation project that is of greater national significance than this one. As deadlines approach to submit applications for ARRA TIGER Grant funding, I urge you to work with local officials who intend to submit applications for the Bethesda BRAC Multi-Modal Traffic Mitigation and Pedestrian Access Project.

Thank you again for your ongoing support of our military community and for your cooperation with local officials and the community to ensure the successful implementation of the BRAC mission at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Van Hollen", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Chris Van Hollen
Member of Congress

cc: Daniel J. Zinder, MD
Mr. David Oliveria
Mr. Jeff Miller
Mr. Brian Hillis